

## TRIANGLING BELLOW'S *SEIZE THE DAY*

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### Abstract

*Over the years, new theories of literary criticism have invariably emerged as a response, critique to, and development of the earlier criticisms. This paper introduces a relatively new literary theory that can enrich the repertoire of literary criticism in Indonesian context, namely family systems therapy or FST, through a critical analysis of Seize the Day by Saul Bellow, an American author whose works mainly deal with the theme of family and the issues revolving it. Partly a critique to Freud's psychoanalysis and its variants, family systems therapy holds that one's identity is a part of a matrix of identity, thereby requiring the analysis of one's interrelatedness with the others involved in the matrix in order to understand one's self. The analysis shows that the protagonist of the novel, Wilhelm, is involved in a triangle in his effort to cope with his anxiety. Triangling is also found to be merely one of the many outlets for the protagonist's anxiety. The paper concludes that family systems theory is appropriate to critically analyze literary works dealing with family matters, such as Seize the Day. This theory offers new insights not only into the practice of literary criticism but also into seeing problems in life.*

**Keywords:** Family systems therapy, triangle, anxiety

### Abstrak

*Teori-teori kritik sastra terus bermunculan, baik sebagai tanggapan, kritik, atau perkembangan dari teori-teori sebelumnya. Makalah ini memperkenalkan sebuah teori yang cukup baru yang bisa memperkaya khasanah kritik sastra di Indonesia, yaitu terapi sistem keluarga, melalui sebuah analisis terhadap novel berjudul Seize the Day karangan Saul Bellow, seorang penulis Amerika yang karya-karyanya terutama mengangkat tema keluarga dan permasalahan yang melingkupinya. Sebagai kritik terhadap teori Psikoanalisis oleh Freud dan variasi-variasinya, terapi sistem keluarga percaya bahwa identitas seseorang adalah bagian dari matriks identitas, sehingga analisis terhadap keterhubungan seseorang dengan orang lain yang terlibat dalam matriks tersebut diperlukan jika ingin memahami diri seseorang. Analisis menunjukkan bahwa protagonis novel tersebut, Wilhelm, terlibat dalam sebuah hubungan segitiga atau triangling dalam usahanya untuk menghadapi kegelisahan hidupnya; selain itu, hubungan segitiga hanyalah satu dari sekian jalan keluar untuk kegelisahan yang dihadapi protagonis. Makalah ini menyimpulkan bahwa teori psikoterapi keluarga cocok untuk menganalisis secara kritis karya-karya sastra yang berkenaan dengan masalah keluarga, seperti Seize the Day. Teori ini menawarkan sudut pandang baru, tidak hanya terhadap praktik dalam kritik sastra, tapi juga terhadap cara melihat permasalahan dalam hidup.*

**Kata kunci:** Terapi sistem keluarga, segitiga, kegelisahan.

## INTRODUCTION

Literature is deeply concerned with humanity. It is the product and reflection of human's thoughts and actions. Considering this nature, literary works have been criticized from multiple approaches, be it from the social, economic, political, religious, and even psychological aspects of life. The theory most popularly used to critically analyze literary works from the psychological aspect is psychoanalytic literary criticism. The psychoanalytic reading is informed by psychoanalysis theory put forward by Sigmund Freud in the early of the twentieth century. The theory has flourished and been developed by many literary critics, such as Carl G. Jung (1947) whose theory of archetypes has been greatly accepted by literary critics; Jaques Lacan (1954) who re-conceptualized Freud's psychoanalysis from post-structuralist/linguistic approach, and many others. Unfortunately, psychoanalytic literary theory is not without any backlash. One of the flaws frequently pinpointed by critics is the theory's exclusive and narrow view of the self as the ultimate entity responsible for the shaping of one's identity, thus denying the significant influence of others or the surrounding environment on the self.

Such a strong critique on the theory's treatment of the self as an isolated entity is addressed by advocates of a relatively new branch in psychology, namely family systems therapy, or popularly abbreviated into FST. More importantly, proponents of family systems therapy in particular agree that psychoanalysis is outdated. John V. Knapp, one of the leading critics who first initiated the use of family systems therapy in literary criticism, for instance declares, "Literary criticism has sent out generations of scholars to do battle with recalcitrant imaginative texts, armed most often with the psychological tools of an early twentieth-century intrapsychic psychology that no

longer answers all the interesting questions posed by those standing on the brink of the twenty first" ("Family Systems Psychotherapy and Literature/Literary Criticism", pp. 1). What he refers to as the "intrapsychic psychology" here is none other than psychoanalysis. It is obvious that Knapp regards psychoanalysis as already obsolete, for it is perceived to have failed in answering present day's questions of literature and humanities in general.

In his comparative critique of the two theories, he further asserts some of the reasons causing Freud's psychoanalysis to be no longer relevant to be applied to literary works at the present century. The ultimate reason is the fact that temporally psychoanalysis that was born a century ago is quite archaic, especially considering the development in the psychological thinking of human beings. The three concepts Knapp specifically considers to be outdated are the unconscious, which is deemed as being too limited in comparison to the complex thinking processes of the brain and the mind; the Oedipus Complex, that is no longer relevant and appealing to the "contemporary scientific community"; and dreams—whose treatments in the practice of psychoanalytic therapy lack of "a strong basis" ("Family Systems Psychotherapy and Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism: A Comparative Critique", pp. 3).

Sarah E. Schiff attests to the "limitations" of psychoanalysis, adding that psychoanalysis is rather subjective, while family systems therapy "can be more objective" (pp.2). The objective nature of family systems therapy is, Schiff further explains, rooted from its vigorous efforts of collecting data on the families of human and animals in order to understand their psychological conditions. On the other hand, psychoanalysis lacks empirical bases, as the data gathered rely solely upon patients' uninterrupted recollection of dreams and

memories. In addition, psychoanalysis disregards the collective nature of human beings and, instead, focuses its attention on the self as a closed, isolated entity.

Family systems therapy then is offered partly to fill in the gaps left by psychoanalysis, especially in its lack of interpsychic psychology or psychosocial dimension. Jeffrey Adams, in his review of Knapp et. al's groundbreaking book in family systems therapy and literary criticism, explains that family systems therapy:

[Answers] the call from the scholarly community for a psychology of literature that addresses the inter-psychic rather than the intra-psychic dimensions of literary characters in the context of their fictional worlds. As such, FST offers the possibility of a social psychology of literature as an alternative to the individual-oriented psychoanalytic approaches that have previously prevailed. (pp.196)

Notably, family systems therapy offers a new perspective in psychological reading of literary works. It places equal importance on the self and others and their relationships with each other. As Knapp evinces in his introduction to this instrumental book, "The family system becomes the source of the matrix of identity, rather than only the individual character" (pp.15). Consequently, the deployment of this theory will allow for the exploration of other relatively important characters than merely the protagonist or any particular character, as well as the dynamics of characters' relationships in a certain literary work, thus broadening the perspectives and enriching the reading of the work.

Unfortunately, as this theory is relatively new, especially in non-Western countries, the application of this theory's insights into literary works has been very limited in number. To start with, there is the instrumental book of *Reading the Family*

*Dance: Family Systems Therapy and Literary Study*, which consists of thirteen essays concerned with FST as a new approach to reading and criticizing literary works and FST re-readings on several canonical literary works previously critized in the light of psychoanalytic literary criticism, such as Bronte's *Jane Eyre* by Rosemary Babbocks, Shakespeare's *Hamlet* by Knapp, and Tony Morrison's *The Bluest Eyes* by Jerome Bump. Another early work of FST literary criticism notable for discussion is Schiff's analysis of Phillip Roth's works that started as her master's thesis. These works have laid the ground for future researchers of FST literary criticism.

The most recent works from some of the rigorous FST literary critics will be those by Allan Chavkin and Nancy F. Chavkin. Allan Chavkin especially opens graduate classes on FST literary criticism on Saul Bellow and other prominent authors whose works deal with family issues, such as the Native American writer, Louise Erdrich, and, certainly, Saul Bellow. More importantly, Chavkin and Chavkin have recently conducted two studies in two different novels of Saul Bellow, namely *Henderson the Rain King* and *Herzog*, respectively. In the former work, they focus on the family dynamics, specifically the conflicts encountered by family members in the novel and how they cope with the conflicts. Meanwhile in the latter work, they "argue that Herzog's recollection of his childhood growing up in poverty on Napoleon Street provides the key to understanding Herzog's later attitudes and self-destructive behavior, even if he does not seem to understand how this crucial period of his life has shaped his personality" (pp.56). At a glance, the argument will sound to have originated from a psychoanalytic reading, namely searching for the root of one's present (mostly negative) behavior in his or her childhood

(negative) experience. However, as explained above, FST reading on literary works in general, and in this case of *Herzog*, reveals that the present behavior and personal identity of Herzog is not extricable from his relations to the (personal identities and or behaviors) of the people he interacts with the most, not only in his childhood but also in his later life, namely his families.

Meanwhile, Bellow's novel under this study, *Seize the Day*, which is considered as Bellow's prominent work and has even been adapted into plays and a film under the same title, has invited many researchers to analyze the novel from the psychological realm due to the intricate personality of the novel's protagonist. Unfortunately, the existing literature of research on this work shows that the work has been read mostly from psychoanalytic point of view, not from family systems therapy. Indeed, most researchers have focused on reading the main character, Wilhelm, either as a subject of Reichian "vegetotherapy (subject) without a professional therapist" (Nilsen, pp 83), a "neurotic" character (Weiss, pp.188), a "masochist" (Clayton, pp.79), "a tragic hero" (Yuanita, pp.7), and "a victim" of life's predicament (Rani, pp.954). As the previous research demonstrates, the character of Wilhelm has been invariably read in isolation, notwithstanding the plot that reveals the intricate relationship he has with his family members, ultimately his father.

Given the fact that Saul Bellow's works mostly deal with family matters, and are indeed, very apt to be read with FST literary criticism, the present study will try to do FST reading in *Seize the Day*, which to this date, has not garnered attention from FST critics. Thus, the following analysis of Wilhelm, the main character of *Seize the Day*, is presented from the perspective of family systems therapy, ultimately

employing Bowen theory of triangling as conceptualized by Peter Titleman, buttressed by other supporting concepts of family systems theory, textual evidences from the novel, and previous research on a similar topic. The reading will hopefully shed a new light in the critical analysis of the novel.

## DISCUSSION: THE ANALYSIS

"Unresolved emotional reactivity to our parents is the most important unfinished business of our lives" (Nichols & Schwartz, pp. 81). This statement may partly explain why the main character of *Seize the Day*, Tommy Wilhelm, after years of "emotional cutoff" from his family returns to live near his father, Dr. Adler. Wilhelm is in a state of anxiety caused by both professional and personal failures in his life. This anxiety drives him to get close to his father, the only person whom he believes can help him. This father-son dynamics also becomes the focus of Daniel Weiss' psychoanalytic reading of *Seize the Day*, in which he contends, "The conflict between father and son is central to the novel"; however, he diverts his attention to the more "psychoanalytic reading," and, instead, continues, "[B]ut, its repressed content is latent throughout until the last moment, when, as Freud describes it, 'the repression is shattered'" (pp.188). It is at this point that psychoanalytic literary criticism can be said to have "failed" answering the major questions, such as how is the dynamics of father-son dyad?; what conflicts arise from the relationship?; how does each person in the dyad cope with the problem?; how does the dyad stand in lieu of other family members or dyads?; etc.

Family systems therapy criticism offers the answers to the above questions. Instead of turning away the attention from father-son relationship to the repressed condition of the son, FST reading looks at the matrix of relationship between the dyad, the conflicts arising from it, and the outlets

for the resulting conflicts. Thus, from the perspective of FST, it can be interpreted that Wilhelm's return to his father's vicinity displays what Roberts Filbert calls "the togetherness fusions," in which, "this 'huddling together' or herding instinct kicks in whenever anxiety increases" (pp.10). Once they become closer, Wilhelm's anxiety is easily transferred to Dr. Adler, resulting in a conflicting relationship between them. As the level of anxiety between Wilhelm and Dr. Adler increases, "it automatically draws in . . . third person and becomes a triangle" (Titelman, pp. 19). This is where Tamkin appears and triggers a triangle among him, Wilhelm, and Dr. Adler. Bowen theory of the Triangle elaborated by Titleman will be helpful in analyzing the relationship in this son-father-stranger triangle.

### **The Outlets of Wilhelm's Anxiety**

Wilhelm has gone through many emotional distresses that contribute to his high level of anxiety. Eventually, when he is overwhelmed by the anxiety, he turns to the immediate family that he thinks is capable and has the obligation to help him, his own father. Wilhelm's anxiety over his present and, especially, his bleak future has taken an outward form. He becomes very disorganized in appearance and habits. He smokes excessively, takes drugs carelessly, takes no care of his apartment, and gets agitated easily: "Wilhelm had pinched out the coal of his cigarette and dropped the butt in his pocket, where there were many more. And as he gazed at his father, the little finger of his right hand began to twitch and tremble; of that he was unconscious, too" (Bellow, pp.25). Dr. Adler notices and is disgusted by how disorganized his son is. The sight of Wilhelm with his peculiar habits makes "Dr. Adler [see] it with silent repugnance . . . The doctor couldn't bear Wilky's dirty habits" (pp.33). In part because of seeing the condition of his son

and in order to prevent Wilhelm from asking for his help again, Dr. Adler suggests Wilhelm visit the pools, contending, "Simple water has a calming effect and would do you more good than all the barbiturates and alcohol in the world" (pp.41). This suggestion brings Wilhelm into a realization that "this advice was as far as his father's help and sympathy would extend" (pp.41). But, he wants "help," and Wilhelm has a strong conviction that Dr. Adler has the obligation to grant him the help because he is his father: "I am his son, he thought. He is my father. He is as much father as I am son—old or not" (pp.40). With this conviction, Wilhelm pressures Dr. Adler to help him. By pressing Dr. Adler and continuously asking for his help, Wilhelm transfers his anxiety towards his father.

According to Filbert, when one party in a two-some relationship is anxious, there are four possible outlets for his or her anxiety: "[T]riangle, conflict, distance, and overfunctioning/underfunctioning reciprocity" (pp.11-12). Triangle is the foremost possible outlet for anxiety and is the focus of this analysis. However, the three other outlets are also observable in the relationship between Wilhelm and Dr. Adler. To start with, it is obvious that their relationship is in conflict. Conflict is characterized by accusations towards each other, which is painful for both parties. Wilhelm and Dr. Adler blame each other for the misery in their lives. Even though Wilhelm is aware that he has made many mistakes that eventually bring him into his present misery, he has a strong urge to change his life. However, this time he believes that he needs the help of his father to restart his life. On the other hand, Dr. Adler has had enough with his son. Not only that, according to Dr. Adler, Wilhelm does not acknowledge the financial help he has given during his service in war (Bellow, pp.

50), and he also has continuously made the same mistake and never listened to him: "I didn't run around with fifty women, either. I was not a Hollywood star. I didn't have time to go to Cuba for a vacation. I stayed at home and took care of my children" (pp.47). Dr. Adler implicitly emphasizes that Wilhelm is a failure because he does not follow his steps, a disappointment considering Wilhelm is his first son.

Wilhelm also shows another type of outlet for his anxiety, which is emotional cutoff. His decision to live emotionally and geographically distant from his father reflects this emotional cutoff. Wilhelm's reflection on his childhood and young-adulthood reveals the presence of anxiety in his relationship with his father. He struggles to lead a life of his own, a life that is different from his father: "He had cast off his father's name, and with it his father's opinion of him" (Bellow, pp. 21). By changing his name into Tommy, Wilhelm is trying to cut any emotional attachment to his father. He tries to start his adulthood by being Tommy, an actor instead of a doctor who lives in Los Angeles, instead of New York.

As for the outlet taking the form of overfunctioning/underfunctioning reciprocity, Dr. Adler's traits match some of the characteristics of an overfunctioner formulated by Filbert, even though he definitely does not "spend a great deal of time seeking and getting more and more help for the underfunctioner's symptoms" (pp.18). Quite the opposite, he does not seem to try really hard to help Wilhelm and his other child, Catherine. This is apparent when Wilhelm asks Dr. Adler whether he will help Catherine to realize her dream to be an artist: "I was glad enough to buy crayons for her when she was four. But now she's a woman of forty and too old to be encouraged in her delusions" (Bellow, pp. 43). Nevertheless, Dr. Adler has the

characteristics of an overfunctioner, one who "knows the answers, does well in life, [and] sees the other has 'the problem'" (pp.18). On the other hand, Wilhelm's characteristics conform to those of the underfunctioner: he "asks for advice unnecessarily; takes all offered help; needed or not, becoming passive; sees self as 'the problem'; and eventually becomes symptomatic" (pp.18). Apparently, the overfunctioning Dr. Adler is a retired physician whom the society respects; he is financially and psychologically stable, whereas Wilhelm is unemployed and is aware that he is a failure, incomparable to his father, who is, "a success. And a success—is a success. I [Wilhelm] never made a success" (Bellow, pp. 47). This realization exacerbates Wilhelm's anxiety, and the anxiety is continuously building up in him that he cannot maintain his relationship with his father and turns to Tamkin for help, thus creating a triangle.

### **Triangling as Wilhelm's Ultimate Outlet of Anxiety**

Indeed, the most conspicuous "outlet of anxiety" that is depicted in the novel is triangling. "Triangling is an ever-present process in the presence of microscopic changes in the comfort levels of dyadic relationships within the larger emotional unit . . . Frequently triangles emerge, or crystallize, when the calm stability of a two-person system is unbalanced by anxiety in the wake of a nodal event" (Titelman, pp. 20). The nodal events that trigger anxiety can be traced back to the death of Wilhelm's mother when he was in Hollywood, pursuing a career that his parents strongly discouraged. After that, he falls to the same mistake of making a decision based on his emotions, pushing him to financial difficulties. He needs help from his father, but Dr. Adler emphasizes, "I can't give you

any money. There would be no end to it if I started. You and your sister would take every last buck of me . . . And I want nobody on my back. Get off! And I give you some advice, Wilky. Carry nobody on your back" (Bellow, pp. 51). Wilhelm is devastated, not only that his father will not help him financially, but he also feels that his father does not care about him: "It isn't the money, but only the assistance; not even assistance, but just the feeling" (pp.53). Apparently, money is the metaphor of paternal love that Wilhelm is seeking and Dr. Adler will never give.

Thus, when the cunning Dr. Tamkin who is awarded the moniker of a "trickster" (Witteveld, pp. 20) approaches him, at first, he "was divided in mind. That the doctor cared about him pleased him. This is what he craved, that someone should care about him, wish him well. Kindness, mercy, he wanted . . . but he was worried, too, and even somewhat indignant. For what right had Tamkin to meddle without being asked?" (pp.69). Regardless of the apparent cunningness of Tamkin, Wilhelm continues to get involved with Tamkin because Tamkin actually, "offers to release [the self as a true soul . . . that can go with joy], by using money to go beyond money, to pass beyond a stock-market 'killing' to a curing, more than material state" (Bradbury, pp. 194). Tamkin offers precisely the help that Wilhelm needs, a help that is given in a caring manner, no matter how cunning Tamkin is, and without relying too much on money—something that he lacks, while his father has plenty. As triangling "is an automatic or involuntary process that is part of the nature of emotional systems" (Titelman, pp. 29), it is arguable that the reason Wilhelm does not listen to his conscience, which tells him what a liar Tamkin is, is because in his present anxious relationship with his father, he automatically

tries to triangle someone, and Tamkin "happens" to be there.

The kind of triangle formed between Tamkin-Wilhelm-Dr. Adler is not a common type studied by family therapists. This does not mean that this kind of triangle is impossible to transpire, because as Michael A. Kerr explains in his personal communication with Titelman, "Triangles may function in other ways that we do not yet recognize. We can know how triangles function by sticking with how, what, when, and where questions, which are all provable" (Titelman, pp. 31). To start with, the triangle involves Tamkin, a non-family member, what Titelman calls "a secondary triangle." Tamkin is connected directly to Wilhelm, but not to Dr. Adler. He is never described in the story to have an encounter with Dr. Adler. However, not only does Dr. Adler know the existence of Tamkin, he also warns Wilhelm not to get tangled with Tamkin: "Because he's probably a liar. Do you believe he invented all the things he claims?" (Bellow, pp. 37) Even though there is no direct reciprocity between Dr. Adler and Tamkin, the two of them are connected by Wilhelm. Whatever happens to Wilhelm as a result of triangling with Tamkin will affect Dr. Adler, such as proven by the fact that Wilhelm finally begs Dr. Adler to help him pay his bills when eventually Wilhelm realizes that Tamkin has deceived him (pp.105).

Another peculiarity in this triangle is the fact that the interconnectedness between the three of them, rather than "leading to emotional disturbance" (Schiff, pp. 21) like the one found in Roth's *Portnoy's Complaint*, is quite beneficial, particularly for Wilhelm. Even though by triangling with Tamkin, Wilhelm's conflict with Dr. Adler is not "shifted out of that original twosome, into the relationship" (Titelman, pp. 20) with the new triangled person, it helps Wilhelm gradually get over his anxiety by going

“with the actual, the Here-and-Now, the glory” (Bellow 85). Early on, Tamkin teaches, “Only the present is real—the here-and-now. Seize the day” (pp.62). John Jacob Clayton, arguing that Wilhelm is a masochist and that Tamkin gives Wilhelm “healing ideas” through his poetry, opines, “Seizing the present moment is seizing the eternal” (pp.79). Thus, Tamkin does not only help reduce Wilhelm’s anxiety but also directs his true soul to find the eternal and leave behind the superficial.

Indeed, as Titelman explains, “triangles can function to reduce the anxiety of one or more members of a family” (pp.29). Another function of the triangle is the ability of the member of the triangle with the highest anxiety to transfer his or her anxiety to the triangled person. Wilhelm may unconsciously transfer his anxiety to Tamkin. However, Tamkin does not passively receive the transferred anxiety; rather, he acts as a psychologist who helps Wilhelm seize his anxiety and stop worrying about the future, because as he says, “The future is full of anxiety” (Bellow, pp. 62). More than just a psychologist, Tamkin “sees himself as ministering to the sick soul of a worldly (and virtually worldwide) community, and especially to Tommy Wilhelm whom, he says, he secretly studies” (Witteveld, pp. 19). Even Tamkin’s deceitful act can be considered a part of Tamkin’s healing processes. To some extent, it succeeds in diverting Wilhelm’s attention to his present situation. Wilhelm is able to at least seize his anxiety over his future and focus on his present situation. He does have to focus on the last money he invests in lard and rye with Tamkin, who holds the power attorney over the shares.

### **Wilhelm’s Lack of Self-Differentiation and the Resulting Triangle**

So far, anxiety has been discussed as the ultimate trigger for triangles. In fact,

anxiety is not the sole trigger of triangles, differentiation of self has similarly significant contribution. In addition, out of the seven important concepts of Bowen theory, “Differentiation of self is the core critical concept of Bowen’s theory of the family as an evolution-based multigenerational emotional system” (Titelman, pp. 35). Indeed, Titelman discusses differentiation, anxiety, and triangles under the same subheading. In line with Titelman, John V. Knapp argues, differentiation of the self is a really important concept and “the other major variable in life is anxiety, particularly chronic anxiety, which places major stresses and strains on the self’s adaptive abilities” (pp.232). Differentiation of self is defined as “the ability to be emotionally controlled while remaining within the emotional intensity of one’s family” (Prochaska and Norcross, pp. 373). According to Titelman, lower level of self-differentiation when combined with a high level of anxiety will result in triangles. On the other hand, when the level of self-differentiation is high and the level of anxiety is low, it is less likely to create “rigid triangles” (Titelman, pp. 32)

In this regard, Wilhelm has a poor differentiation of self; in other words, he has a fused relationship with his father. He cannot control his emotions and remains too attached to his immediate family, Dr. Adler. Wilhelm’s decisions throughout his life, for example, are mostly driven by his emotion rather than his logic:

Still for three months Wilhelm delayed his trip to California. He wanted to start out with the blessings of his family, but they were never given. He quarreled with his parents and his sister. And then, when he was best aware of the risks and knew a hundred reasons against going and had made himself sick with fear, he left home. This was typical of Wilhelm. After much thought and hesitation and debate he invariably took the course he



had rejected innumerable times. Ten such decisions made up the history of his life. He had decided that it would be a bad mistake to go to Hollywood, and then he went. He had made up his mind not to marry his wife, but ran off and got married. He had resolved not to invest money with Tamkin, and then had given him a check. (Bellow, pp. 19)

This passage sums up the life of Wilhelm who has been the victim of his own decisions, ones that he makes out of emotions. He even goes as far as lying to himself. In his continuous lies and pretensions, he invents a new identity by the name of Tommy, although in the end he admits, "Adler being in his mind the title of the species, Tommy the freedom of the person. But Wilky was his inescapable self" (pp.21). Wilky is the name by which his father calls him, indicating an emotional fusion between Wilhelm and his father.

### **Wilhelm's Interlocking Triangles**

Furthermore, as Titelman explains, triangles usually interlock with each other; there is no single triangle. This is also the case for *Seize the Day*. In addition to the secondary triangle between Wilhelm-Dr. Adler-Tamkin, there is also a "partial mental construct triangle" consisting of Wilhelm, Dr. Adler, and Wilhelm's deceased mother. Wilhelm cannot detach himself from his deceased mother. It can be inferred that he has "a distant and conflictual relationship with [his] father, a warm and fused relationship with [his] mother" (Titelman, pp. 56). In one occasion, Wilhelm forces Doctor Adler to remember the exact date of his mother's death, of which Dr. Adler has no memory, causing Wilhelm to have emotional distress (pp.24). Another triangle is also observable among Wilhelm, Margaret, and Olive—Wilhelm's Catholic mistress; among Wilhelm, Margaret, and Scissor (Wilhelm's dog); and among

Wilhelm, Margaret, and their two sons. It can be argued, however, that the original dyad is Wilhelm and his father, with his mother becomes the person they triangle in their relationship. Hence, the basic or primary triangle is among Wilhelm, Dr. Adler, and Wilhelm's mother.

The interlocking triangles in Wilhelm's life may be explained in this way: when his mother died, Wilhelm creates a triangle that Moynihan-Bradt as quoted by Titelman calls "old, triangles, new players," (pp.20), in which Wilhelm projects his anxiety with his father to his wife or triangles Margaret into his anxious relationship with his father. Later on, when he and Margaret no longer have a stable relationship, he turns to his mistress. When Wilhelm's anxiety becomes overwhelming and his mistress, who is not a family member, cannot alleviate it, he is driven to get close to Dr. Adler. Apparently, the unbalance anxiety in the relationship between Wilhelm and Dr. Adler triggers another and most peculiar triangle with Tamkin. Titelman explains, "When the emotional process cannot be contained within a triangle, *interlocking triangles* are formed within and across the multiple nuclear families in the larger multigenerational family emotional system" (pp.21). It is the triangle with Tamkin that eventually helps him seize his anxiety and heighten his level of differentiation of self.

Nevertheless, the triangle with Tamkin cannot be considered the only factor determining the success of Wilhelm to seize his anxiety, focus on his here-and-now, and find his true soul. Clinton W. Trowbridge, in his water-imagery analysis on *Seize the Day*, argues that "the very sufferings [his troubles] cause him have brought his soul into being: Wilhelm's 'pretender soul' has died, his 'real soul' has been born. It may not live long" (pp.71). In line with Trowbridge, Allan Chavkin contends,

“Tommy Wilhelm does suffer greatly, but his suffering leads to his spiritual birth” (pp.6). This spiritual rebirth is apparent in the tears pouring down at the end of the novel, when Wilhelm accidentally gets swept into a funeral ceremony. Malcolm Bradbury remarks, “His final release may thus be supposed to be his restoration, his atonement, his discovery of his own mortality but also of its potential,” (pp.194) a potential to change his miserable life. Triangle is, then, one the many external factors and outlets of anxiety that help contribute to Wilhelm’s emotional development. Bellow’s Wilhelm has shown the one who can really make changes is the person him/herself with the support system of family, relatives or friends.

## CONCLUSION

Thus far, the present study has attempted to evince that family systems therapy sheds a new light in the psychological reading of literary works. It is able to answer questions about and beyond the self, which has always been treated as a closed entity in psychoanalysis, because as Kerr and Bowen explain, “Family systems theory radically departed from previous theories of human emotion functioning by virtue of its conceptualization of the family as an emotional unit” (pp.81). As the findings of the study demonstrate, emotion is as interrelated as identity. The anxiety experienced by Wilhelm is the result of his conflict with himself, his father, his mother, and all the people in his emotional unit. If there is a matrix of identity, there will also be a matrix of emotion, where especially in family as an emotional unit, one’s emotion is interrelated to the emotion of the other members of family. Hence, the analysis of a single character is inextricable from analyzing his or her relationship with other characters, or, the dynamics of the interrelationship within the emotional unit.

In other words, the traditional intrapsychic reading of literary works which has already been obsolete is reconceptualized and broadened into an interpsychic one. Finally, as this relatively new approach in literary criticism is expected to enrich the repertoire of literary criticism in Indonesia, it is highly recommended that future researchers apply the insights from this theory into the reading of Indonesian literary works under the theme of family.

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